

Lundi 18 mars 2019

Séminaire interdisciplinaire du
Centre de recherches sur le Japon
(EHESS)

« Japan's Imperial Underworlds: Intimate Encounters at the Borders of Empire »

David R. AMBARAS (North Carolina State University)

Abstract

In this presentation, I examine the histories of people who moved, the relationships they created, and the anxieties they provoked, in the spatial and social borderlands between Japan and China from the 1860s to the 1940s. Japan's imbrication in new geopolitical structures and spatial flows engendered forms of intimacy that were seen as problematic, or even horrific, because they transgressed notions of territory marked by stable, defensible borders and notions of place marked by distinct identities and social roles. Yet rather than see those borders and roles as already established and thus violated, I use cases of transgressive intimacy to highlight the ways in which territoriality and spatial imaginaries were being articulated in the imperial era. Excavating long-forgotten histories of child trafficking, marriage migration, and piracy, I argue that mobile subjects in marginal locations not only destabilized official projects for the regulation of territory and the policing of underworlds, but also stimulated fantasies that opened new spaces for the elaboration of imperial power in its material and discursive forms. Scaling from the global to the local and corporeal, I emphasize that for the people who lived it, the Japanese nation-empire was one of several overlapping spatial formations that emerged from modern Japan's relations with a region in which the historically central Chinese presence continued to loom large.